

LADYFINGERS

By JACKSON GREGORY

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THIS STARTS THE STORY

A safe has been cracked and the thief has escaped. Ambrose, a detective, calls on Joe Le Brun, gangster, and demands to know who did it. Le Brun tells him that "Tony" and "Frank" know nothing about it, and accuses Ashe, otherwise known as "Ladyfingers," as the criminal, and with or without evidence, the two agree to fasten the crime on him. At this point, Polly, daughter of Le Brun, appears. Ambrose has a warm regard for Polly, but is suspicious of her preference for "Ladyfingers." A struggle ensues, and Le Brun, and Lieutenant Ambrose, he says, "I want to talk with you about a man named Ashe. He is a criminal. He deserves no consideration. He is a menace to society. The hour he is arrested, I will see that he is sent to the penitentiary for not less than ten years." You own come to me for \$5000. You own Ladyfingers, for it is springtime, and thus Polly Le Brun finds him. She tells him of the "frame-up" with Ambrose and her father at the bottom of it, and she drift into personalities. Ladyfingers is made aware of Polly's real regard for him. Now in a general way Bobbie Ashe, who is well known as a clever con-artist, bound down the great stream of life. He could rob an over-ful safe or pick a bulging pocket with the merriest heart in the city; it is very much to be doubted if, though a golden reward were offered him, he could have borne to have wounded the feelings of a little child or the corner of a woman's eye. He was a criminal but no vandal; he was a thief but none the less a gentleman.

hail," he mused, his eyes bright with his inspiration. "And plenty more when that's gone. And there's the big French car at Lamont's which will go mighty well with your little French heels, Miss Polly."

So he called up Lamont's.

CHAPTER VI
The Stethair Diamond

Robert Ashe was young. Youth explains much. It is the time of boiling blood and bubbling spirits. He was, after all, a boy and something of a poet. Such a one in another time and in his own fashion may have been Francois Villon.

As he was driven back to the Bella French in the big French car which had cost him all that he had extorted from Hamilton Hamilton and which was to be his little gift to Polly Le Brun, his heart was standing high in cretely to the hiding place where the contents of the looted safe awaited his coming. . . . that small hollow at the end of a Mission street wharf sheltered by a pile, covered by a bit of two-inch plank, which in the olden days he had hidden his petter pifflings. . . . later he would see Polly and leave her gasping over his present to her. Then not because he feared the law or the man who twisted it to his own purposes, but because the springtime lured to her woody haunts and because he had deeply for Polly Le Brun, he would take the ferry for Sixteenth street and a train on the other side. His chauffeur, paid to do nothing else, put him in touch with Polly. He ran up to his room, but he knew how to be, which is saying a good deal. The clamor of his telephone, which had been ringing almost incessantly for upward of an hour, put him in touch with Polly. "Say, Bobbie," her voice clearly excited although with a note in it which Ashe had never heard and which now he could not explain, "I want to see you the worst way. Suppose we go out to lunch together?"

What is it this time, Polly?" Polly hesitated briefly, seeming actually at a loss for words, a thing new in Polly. But in a moment she had explained just enough to make clear that she was very anxious to talk over some matter of tremendous importance to her.

With a sweeping, farewell look at his room Ashe picked up a couple of worn little volumes, thrust one into each coat pocket and went out, the remainder of his belongings upon the instant consigned to the next lodger or to the landlord. Dismissing his chauffeur with instructions for the afternoon and morning he boarded a street car and hurried the half dozen blocks to a meeting with Polly.

Never in all of his merry life had Robert Ashe been gayer than today. He was going upon his vacation; he was traveling light; he was building kaleidoscopic pictures of the things the country would offer to a spirit surfeited with the city. Just when he was in the country he was going he did not know. But he was going tramping down through the green fields; he was going to know the smell of his own campfire in his nostrils; perhaps he would fry his own fish; certainly he would know the tang of pine forests.

He was in California; he need not be at a loss for whatever he sought; he need not worry his brain with the mysteries of time tables, either. Any train, going in any direction, would carry him out of cobbled streets and into fragrant lanes.

Yes, Polly was excited and, he thought at first, vaguely troubled. But, with a quick laugh, she assured him that that was "all in his eye," and leading the way to a secluded table in a secluded little cafe, she told him what she wanted.

"You're doing a hot-foot out of Frisco, is'n't it," said Polly. "Maybe I look like a door mat; but when a man goes to wipe his number tens on me, he finds I ain't."

"Ambrose," returned Ashe sharply, "Papa," returned Polly, emphasizing her attitude by a twitch of her nose.

"Do you know, I believe I'm the first one that's slipped Joe Le Brun's face-good and hard! He didn't like it. This morning, after I went home from your place, he was waiting for me. He started in by telling me what he thought about you. When he got through I said, 'But he's got pretty eyes, ain't he, dad?' Polly laughed.

"When the balloon ascension was over he looked like it had made him seasick."

"Polly," said Ashe gravely, his gray eyes suddenly troubled, "I'm sorry. 'Scuse me, Polly. 'Can't I fight with papa without the Examiner getting out an extra? But it's my going to do with it?'"

"Bobbie, we did fight and fight hard. I saw what was coming, and before papa got the chance to tell me to beat it, I'm not going back, either."

Now Polly Le Brun, as will become evident later on, was lying. But her eyes, level upon Ashe's, studying his changing expressions, told nothing which Polly would not corroborate with her lips.

Ashe was frankly distressed. Polly, save for the little sign of the twisting of her slim fingers about her wine glass, was never more at ease in her whole life. For Polly, playing now for big stakes, was in all essentials the daughter of Joe Le Brun.

"The whole thing was because of me," he asked Ashe. "Just because you—"

"You haven't changed your mind about the punkins?"

"No, Polly. I was going to take a train tonight."

"Well, while it's going to be tough on Frisco town I guess we both drift about the same day. I got a swell girl friend down in Los Angeles. That's where my ticket's going to read."

"Hain't you better see your father again?"

"Feeling like you was to blame?" said Polly. "And wanting to see me squared? Well, I guess I have got your part once or twice; but I never forget, Bobbie Ashe, that when my time comes get in wrong somewhere I could count on you. Am I right?"

"Of course you're right, Polly. If there's anything I can do for the south, but when I go traveling I don't want to go like a washerwoman." She opened her purse with a sudden jerk, spilling upon the stained cloth a half dozen small silver pieces.

"That's my bank! Hey, waiter. Help yourself! And now," as the waiter withdrew, taking with him the last of Polly's two-bit and ten-cent pieces, "you understand?"

"I understand," smiled Ashe. "It will take me about an hour."

Polly laid a detaining hand upon his arm as he was pushing back his chair. Ashe meant to sell a car he had so recently purchased, to hand over to Polly whatever sum might be realized upon a hurried, sacrifice sale. But Polly meant otherwise.

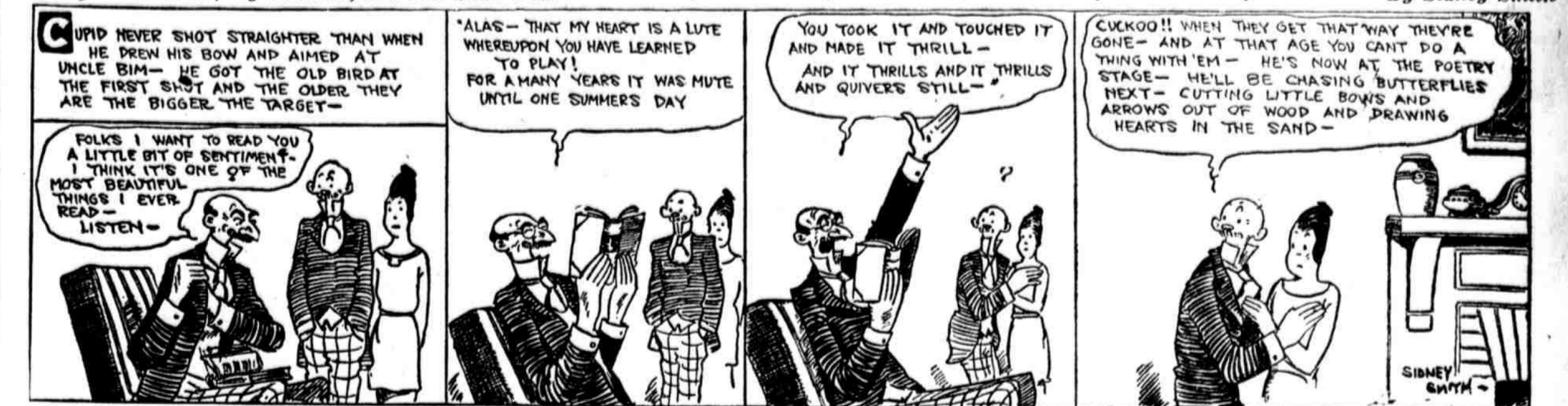
"No, you don't, Bobbie!" she told him, a little catch for the instant making her voice uncertain. "You'd split even with me if I'd let you; you'd slip me the whole thing if I asked you for it; but I won't. I ain't taking anything off you but a few hours of your time. If you won't do the thing my way—"

She lifted her shoulders.

(CONTINUED MONDAY)

THE GUMPS—Listen, My Children, and You Shall Hear

By Sidney Smith



SOMEBODY'S STENOG—An Alibi

By Hayward



The Young Lady Across the Way

SOMETIMES THERE IS "A JUSTICE"

By FONTAINE FOX

SCHOOL DAYS

By DWIG



PETEY—And They Kept It Up Until Midnight

By C. A. Voight



THE CLANCY KIDS—Oh, Peggie! What We Know About You!

By Percy L. Crosby

